

The ELI SIG on Family and Succession Law Selection Committee has awarded the 2025 PhD prize to **Leontine Bruijnen** for her doctoral dissertation entitled

‘How can private international law bridge the gap between the recognition of unknown family relations such as kafala and child marriage for family law and migration law purposes?’.

The Committee found the thesis to be an original and timely contribution addressing a clear gap in the existing literature. By focusing on kafala and child marriage – both paradigmatic examples of legally unfamiliar or contested family relations – the dissertation tackles pressing questions at the intersection of private international law, family law and migration law.

The work’s strengths lie in its clear research question, its careful doctrinal analysis, its comparative design and its methodological care. The author combines detailed study of national and EU instruments with a carefully designed empirical component based on focus groups conducted within the FAMIMOVE project, producing insights that are at once scholarly and practically minded without overstating its reach. The thesis is further distinguished by an impressive and well-structured body of case law, including detailed engagement with decisions of first-instance courts, which reflects a strong commitment to a law in action perspective. Moreover, the dissertation demonstrates considerable comparative depth and intercultural sensitivity. The comparative treatment of Belgium and Germany is particularly effective, and the thesis situates its findings within broader European and international frameworks. Importantly, the study offers concrete, usable recommendations that will be of interest to scholars, practitioners and policy makers concerned with recognition and protection in contexts of cross border mobility.

The Committee also appreciated the author’s critical engagement with own assumptions, in particular the idea that private international law was always the starting point in family and migration law. The thesis is well structured and written in precise legal language, with helpful summaries at the end of chapters. While some sections might benefit from tighter synthesis or reorganisation to enhance accessibility, these points are offered as constructive suggestions for future refinement and do not detract from the work’s substantial achievements. Finally, the Committee considers the dissertation to open up important avenues for further research, for example, with regard to the structural limits of private international law in EU migration contexts. The thesis convincingly shows that PIL techniques may lose traction where EU law prescribes an autonomous and uniform interpretation of family-related concepts for the purposes of migration law, thereby pre-empting classical recognition mechanisms. According to the Committee, this would raise broader questions about the relationship between private international law and emerging EU principles of recognition, mutual trust and effectiveness, which deserve to be further developed in future research.

Taken together, originality, rigour, comparative depth and practical relevance led the Committee to conclude that this dissertation makes a significant contribution to the field. For these reasons the 2025 prize is awarded to Leontine Bruijnen.

SPECIAL MENTION

The ELI Family and Succession Law SIG Selection Committee has awarded a special mention to **Rachele Zamperini** for her doctoral dissertation entitled

‘Defining the best interest of the child in family law disputes: from theoretical analysis to practical application’

The Selection Committee found the thesis to be an innovative contribution to the development of European family law, given its focus on the theoretical basis of the concept of best interests of the child and its mapping of applications. In particular, the thesis draws on classical general theory of law and critical legal studies to develop a model for use in family law disputes concerning the establishment and recognition of legal parentage resulting from adoption, assisted reproductive technology and surrogacy. Zamperini’s thesis is appreciated for its attempt to provide guidelines for the consistent application of the best interests of the child. This attempt is practically relevant, as while the best interest of the child is a recognised cornerstone of European and national family law, its intrinsic flexibility often results in inconsistent judicial decisions.

The work combines an investigation into the best interests of the child as a theoretical concept and as a principle of law in action, by extensively analysing and comparing the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and a national case law. This dual perspective, accompanied by a clear research claim and structure, is the work’s main strength, making it particularly original and innovative.

The analysis could be extended to additional legal systems, which would further enrich the comparative perspective and strengthen the empirical foundation of the proposed adjudication model. Building on the solid foundations already established, such an expansion would enhance the work’s relevance and applicability across a broader European context.

SPECIAL MENTION

The ELI Family and Succession Law SIG Selection Committee has decided to award a special mention to **Antonio Jesús Calzado Llamas** for the doctoral thesis entitled

‘Los derechos del cónyuge viudo y de la pareja supérstite en derecho civil comparado e internacional privado’.

The Committee considers the thesis a rigorous and substantial contribution to European family and succession law. It is distinguished by a methodologically precise analysis of legislation, case law and doctrine, combined with an unusually broad comparative perspective covering five major European legal systems, Germany, Spain, France, Italy and the United Kingdom, and their interaction with EU private international law under Regulations 650/2012, 2016/1103 and 2016/1104. This approach allows the author to identify recurring structural tensions between national solutions and the European framework.

A particular strength of the thesis is its comparative synthesis and its *de lege ferenda* reflections on the protection of surviving spouses and partners and on the persistent miscoordination between *lex matrimonii* and *lex successionis*. At the same time, the Committee notes that some of the proposed remedies, such as expanding party autonomy or introducing additional connecting factors, do not fully resolve these tensions and may conflict with core principles of Regulation 650/2012, notably legal certainty and the unity of the succession statute. These critical points, however, underscore the thesis’s ability to expose the limits of current and proposed solutions and to stimulate further debate on the structural trade-offs inherent in European succession and matrimonial property law.